
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CO-OPERATIVES

POLICY STATEMENT: EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR CO-OPERATIVES

The Ministerial Council on Future Directions for Co-operatives comprises approximately 20 sector representatives and 11 Government Departments. The Council is examining the future operations of the co-operative movement in terms of legislation, education, economic interaction, research and statistical analysis, finance and marketing development.

The Council has created eight task oriented working parties, co-ordinated by a small Secretariat, to explore options for the promotion and development of the sector in these areas.

These working parties report regularly to the Ministerial Council, which meets on a quarterly basis.

Uri Windt
Secretary
Ministerial Council
- Future Directions for Co-operatives
c/- Floor 4,
161-169 Macquarie Street,
Parramatta, NSW 2150
Tel: (02) 689 8120
Fax: (02) 689 8133

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1. Introduction

1.1.1 The central goal of the Ministerial Council is to **promote a dynamic and cohesive co-operative sector** capable of significantly contributing to economic development and employment growth in New South Wales. Co-operatives can also contribute to broader community well-being insofar as they embody in a practical way the values of self-help for mutual benefit and democratic participation.

1.1.2 The Central Goal will be achieved through integrated strategies which are summarised in a series of policy statements adopted by the Ministerial Council. One of these strategies is for Education and Training for Co-operatives. With 4.6 million memberships, mobilising the human resources of the Sector must be seen as a priority task for Co-operative development.

1.2 The Co-operatives' education and training strategy aims to:

1.2.1 provide the education and training needs of the members, directors/executive officers and employees of co-operative enterprises and their representative associations;

1.2.2 develop and support greater awareness of the co-operative sector in professional and business services, public sector bodies, education institutions, industry associations, and unions that directly affect the functional environment of co-operatives; and

1.2.3 foster a general social environment supportive of the co-operative sector, its values and objectives, particularly by the introduction of a more significant co-operative content into school and other education curricula.

In each of these areas the strategy will establish clear educational objectives, outline possible program content and identify appropriate delivery, co-ordination and review mechanisms.

While it will be desirable in implementing such a strategy to allocate resources to educational activities that will result in rapid short-term gains, it is essential to recognize both the importance of investing a proportion

of available resources in educational activities designed to influence the wider social environment in the longer term and the necessity to subject the strategy program to regular review in the light of changes in the economy and other factors beyond the immediate influence of the Co-operative Sector. Thus, an effective co-operative education strategy will include elements that are both immediate and cumulative in their effects.

2. The Co-operative Sector

2.1 Objectives

2.1.1 To strengthen the commitment within the co-operative sector to co-operative principles and values and to the development of a more cohesive and economically dynamic co-operative sector.

2.1.2 To enhance the capacity of co-operative members, directors/executive officers and employees to participate fully and effectively in the democratic functioning of their organisations.

2.1.3 To extend co-operative participants' knowledge of co-operative law, structures and practices.

2.2 Content

The content range of learning programs for co-operative participants is potentially quite wide. For example, topics such as the following may need to be addressed: co-operative principles/values; co-operative sector in the economy; co-operatives and local/regional development; co-operative history and international comparisons; co-operative management; participation skills; co-operatives and unionism; co-operative law; co-operative organisation and structure; co-operative accounting and reporting practices.

2.3 Mechanisms

2.3.1 The diverse needs and circumstances of the co-operative sector require a range of training mechanisms and modes of delivery. There is a need for accredited courses, special short courses for a variety of purposes and groups, and self education options.

2.3.2 Existing sector-based training agencies have an established role in meeting some of these needs. They are the most appropriate mechanism for certain specialist and fast-response needs, particularly relating to sector policy development/advice and legislative review processes.

2.3.3 TAFE is the principal mechanism for post-secondary vocational training and further education with a capacity to deliver a wide range of learning programs throughout the state. There is a strong case for TAFE to develop the capacity to provide on-going education and training support for the co-operative sector much as it does for other sectors of the economy. Participation by Co-operative Sector representative on various relevant industry curriculum Advisory Committees within TAFE would provide an important basis for long term relationship to evolve between TAFE and the Sector. Initially TAFE Outreach might be the best mechanism for developing this capacity because of its ability to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of specific groups and to provide a medium through which to access TAFE mainstream provision where appropriate.

2.3.4 A standing Advisory Committee on Education and Training for Co-operatives could assist co-ordination between the various education/training providers. Its functions would include: monitoring co-operative education/training provision; facilitating co-operation between providers; and advising government, education authorities and training agencies on emerging needs and appropriate provision.

Such a committee might consist of representatives from the co-operative sector, the Department of Co-operative Societies, the Department of TAFE, the Department of Education. It could be formed under the auspices of the Ministerial Council.

2.3.5 Co-operative education/training needs assessment and liaison with training agencies would be facilitated if all co-operatives were encouraged to adopt an education and training policy for members and staff and officers. Such a policy should outline an educational and training activities programme and designate persons to take responsibility for its implementation.

2.3.6 An immediate task for the Advisory Committee on Education and Training for Co-operatives (2.3.4) would be researching, publishing and distributing a directory of current training programmes and resource materials relevant to those involved in the co-operative sector. This should be circulated through the sector and used to encourage co-operatives to operate their own education programmes for members/directors by using existing training programmes and resources.

3. The Functional Environment

3.1 Objectives

3.1.1 To develop amongst professionals, professional and industry organisations and educational institutions significant to the co-operative sector, greater awareness both of the nature and extent of the co-operative sector and of co-operatives as a corporate form.

3.1.2 To develop appropriate knowledge within such organisations of co-operative principles and practice.

3.2 Content

Content in this area will vary greatly according to the needs of specific personnel, ranging from detailed information on co-operative law to more general information on co-operatives as a viable form of business.

3.3 Mechanisms

3.3.1 There is a need for a more systematic and co-ordinated effort by the co-operative sector to establish stronger functional links with relevant professional, public sector and educational bodies. All components of the sector potentially have a part to play in developing these links and the role of the Ministerial Council can facilitate the process. Its work in this area would be more effective if supported by an Information and Education Unit within the Development Branch of the Department of Co-operative Societies. Such a Unit could develop guidelines as per 2.3.5 and could initiate and/or assist a variety of information and awareness programs for specific constituencies, including the mass media, implemented either by the Unit itself or by sector-based agencies.

3.3.2 Information and awareness programmes aimed at professionals, organisations and institutions significant to the co-operative sector should give priority to programmes targetted at lawyers, accountants and business advisers, so that they are in a position to appropriately encourage co-operatives as a suitable form of business enterprise.

3.3.3 Mechanisms to do this may include the establishment of a pool of relevant

professionals skilled in co-operatives to prepare a "Guide to Co-operatives" to assist their colleagues in advising clients and to provide an informal advisory service. Similarly, another method is to conduct a series of seminars on co-operatives in conjunction with relevant professional associations on a decentralised basis around N.S.W. and to prepare regular articles for selected industry and/or professional journals.

4. The Social Environment

4.1 Objectives

To foster an informed and supportive social environment for co-operative development by:

4.1.1 Promoting greater attention to co-operative values, experience and forms within the school curriculum; and,

4.1.2 The on-going review and evaluation of school and other post-secondary educational curricula from the perspective of co-operative values and the development of the co-operative sector.

4.2 Content

Three broad content areas are relevant in this context:

4.2.1 co-operatives as a form of economic organisation;

4.2.2 co-operatives as a form of social organisation; and,

4.2.3 co-operative values and principles.

4.3 Mechanisms

The 'Information and Education Unit' of the Development Branch in the Department of Co-operative Societies as proposed above (3.3.1) could also assist on-going liaison between the sector and educational institutions and authorities. The Unit could assist educational authorities to locate personnel in co-operatives that could assist, or it may provide information and representation in the work of syllabus and advisory committees. The functions of this Unit could include initiating the development of co-operative teaching resources for use in schools, TAFE and other educational institutions and the necessary professional development associated with the use of these resources.